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Institute Brief: Achieving Quality Services: A Checklist for Evaluating Your Agency

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ACHIEVING QUALITY SERVICES: A CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING YOUR AGENCY

BY DORIS HAMNER, JAIMIE CIULLA TIMMONS, & DAVID HOFF

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several trends have led state service systems to focus more directly on employment as an expected outcome of service delivery for many individuals who have traditionally experienced difficulty in successfully maintaining employment. These trends include welfare reform and the replacement of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program; the replacement of the Job Training Partnership Act by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the incorporation of the Rehabilitation Act as part of WIA; and the stated goal of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of People with Disabilities to extensively expand the employment participation rate of people with disabilities. These significant legislative mandates are sending a clear message to various public systems and service providers: the need to improve services to enhance employment outcomes for job seekers with disabilities. This assessment checklist was developed for agencies to evaluate the quality and responsiveness of their services and how well they accommodate for the needs of individuals with disabilities. While this checklist emphasizes the provision of supports to job seekers with disabilities, systems are also evaluated so that both lasting and beneficial changes can be made that improve employment supports for all job seekers.

WHERE THIS CHECKLIST CAME FROM

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) examined the characteristics of effective services at the system level based on the experiences of individuals who have successfully used a state agency or service system to find employment. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nineteen adults with disabilities who used either generic systems that provide supports to all job seekers (such as a One-Stop Career Center or TANF) or disability-specific agencies (state departments of Vocational Rehabilitation [VR], Mental Health [MH], and Mental Retardation or Developmental Disability [MR/DD]). Interviews focused on the individual's experiences in receiving services, including helpful aspects and barriers. Study findings identified five essential elements to positive and effective agency services from the consumer's perspective. These elements are agency, culture, consumer directedness, quality personnel, access to resources, and coordinated services.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS CHECKLIST

With these elements as a foundation, the following tool was designed to assist agency personnel to determine how their agency is performing in each of these key areas. The goal was to create a helpful tool that can assist you in evaluating the quality and responsiveness of your agency's services. Other purposes include:

- Identification of service areas where additional technical assistance or training is needed
- Maintaining or improving the quality of supports.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS CHECKLIST

The checklist is divided into five major sections, one for each essential item: agency culture, consumer directedness, quality personnel, access to resources, and coordinated services. Respondents should place a check mark under the column that best represents their agency's delivery of that particular item. You can complete one section at a time if you prefer to evaluate each category separately, or you can assess the agency's performance in its entirety by completing the entire checklist. Staff at multiple levels of your agency are encouraged to use this checklist to obtain varying perspectives. Some items on the list may or may not apply to the employment supports offered at your agency. When this occurs, note the reason why an item is inapplicable. Respondents can also feel free to add specific items in addition to those already identified, in order to customize the checklist to your agency's unique services or priorities.

In reviewing and using this checklist, it is important to recognize that agencies and systems are organized and operate in a wide variety of ways. This checklist includes items applicable to a range of agencies and systems, but not all items will apply to all entities. As agencies and systems use this checklist, bear in mind the wide array of structures and delivery mechanisms that exist and determine which items are most applicable to your own organization.

Five Essential Elements

Partially in place
Fully in place
Not in place
Not applicable

1. AGENCY CULTURE <i>Social environment is warm, and staff have welcoming demeanors and positive reactions/attitudes.</i> <i>Physical environment is accessible and equipment is user-friendly.</i>				
This agency has signs that convey a positive tone.				
Agency personnel at the reception area are helpful, friendly, and will try to answer all questions.				
The environment is welcoming.				
There are clearly visible, accessible features in the form of ramps, doors, and bathrooms.				
There are specific features available that improve the accessibility of technology at the site such as touch screens, and voice recognition software.				
2. CONSUMER DIRECTEDNESS* <i>Active involvement and choice-making by job seeker throughout all stages of the job search.</i> <i>Services are tailored to the unique needs of each job seeker.</i>				
The consumer can select or change caseworkers easily at this agency.				
The consumer can hire non-traditional resources as family or community members, to help with job-related needs.				
Consumers have direct control over their services by managing their own cash or vouchers.				
Funds are portable making it possible to change service providers with ease.				
This agency has individuals with disabilities as staff members.				
This agency provides genuine opportunities for consumers to evaluate the quality of their services and then it acts on those suggestions.				
Agency staff encourages job seekers to contact employers themselves.				
Personnel encourage the consumers to discuss their interests and concerns throughout the process.				
Personnel offer choices to job seekers about job search strategies to use such as sending resumes, cold calling or using Web-based search engines.				
Personnel offer choices about potential career matches based on skills and interests.				
Personnel tailor supports to the unique needs of each individual.				
The individual's preferences and interests are the primary criteria for the types of positions individuals are referred to and placed in.				
Personnel empower job seekers by teaching job search techniques.				
Personnel educate individuals about their employment rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.				

* For the purposes of this checklist, the term "consumer" is used to refer to the individual receiving services.
We recognize that settings and organizations may use alternate terms such as job seeker, customer, or client.

Five Essential Elements

Partially in place — Not in place
Fully in place — Not applicable

3. QUALITY PERSONNEL <i>Demonstrated reliability and consistency.</i> <i>Provided emotional support (encouragement, motivation, confidence-building).</i>				
Job contacts are solicited and received from family and friends for every job search.				
Personnel provide call-backs within 24 hours and provide ongoing and regular contact.				
Counselors will meet with consumers when convenient including evenings and weekends.				
Personnel are available to meet consumers at convenient locations including coffee shops, homes, etc.				
Counselors will go with consumers to job fairs and interviews.				
Personnel help with resumes, cover letters, mock interviews, presentation skills and show the consumer how to use the resources of the agency.				
Personnel have the skills and competency to do their jobs and have the critical knowledge of areas/values as identified by consumers.				
Counselors respect an individual's choice about disclosure of his/her disability, and do not disclose to employers without consumer permission.				
Counselors will contact the other services the consumer may be using only with the individual's permission.				
4. ACCESS TO RESOURCES <i>Ample job seeking resources, including job listings, job readiness training, skills workshops, and technology such as computers and fax machines.</i>				
Training is provided to consumers on the best methods for identifying and accessing resources.				
Orientation is required as a standard part of service delivery.				
Staff know and refer individuals to additional local resources, including support groups, assistive technology, advocacy, and self-help groups.				
Consumers are trained on how to access additional resources in the community in order to meet their long-term needs.				
5. COORDINATED SERVICES <i>When employment support professionals join forces to meet consumers' needs</i> <i>Consumers referred between agencies to receive the best services</i>				
This agency has made arrangements for co-delivery of services with other organizations in the form of interagency agreements.				
Our interagency collaboration is best described as both having a shared sense of purpose and a mutual respect for the counterpart agency.				
Dialogue is maintained between agency personnel by using informal (casual discussions, phone calls, e-mail contact) and formal communication links (includes regular meetings that are scheduled in advance.)				
Support is provided for individuals on how to contact outside resources, i.e., how to make contact, what to ask for at different types of agencies.				

ADDITIONAL ICI PUBLICATIONS

can be found on the web at:

www.communityinclusion.org/publications

Evaluating Your Agency and Its Services: A
Checklist for People with Disabilities
Tools for Inclusion (September 2002)

Understanding the SSI Work Incentives.
Fact Sheet (November 2001)

Quality Employment Services: Will You Know
It When You See It?
Institute Brief (January 2001)

One-Stop Centers: A Guide for Job Seekers
with Disabilities.
Tools for Inclusion (November 2000)

Networking: A Consumer Guide to an
Effective Job Search.
Tools for Inclusion (January 1999)

Helpful Hints: How to Fill Out a Winning
PASS Application.
Tools for Inclusion (July 1999)

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